

RSS – Why Hindu Rashtra K. S. Sudarshan

When the Shahi Imam of Jama of Delhi went to Mecca on a pilgrimage, a local resident asked him, "Are you a Hindu?" The Imam was startled by this question and replied, "No, I am a Muslim." When Imam Saheb asked him the reason for calling him a Hindu, he replied that all Hindustanis were called Hindu there. (Saptahik Hindustan, May 1,1977)

What does "Hindu" Connote ?

Replying to the felicitation at the Indian Association Lahore, on February 3, 1884, Sir Syed Ahmed the founder of Aligarh University said, "We normally associate the word Nation with Hindus and Mussalmans. In my opinion, the concept of nation is not to be linked with one's religious beliefs because all of us, whether Hindus or Mussalmans, have grown in this soil, enjoy common points of sustenance and prosperity and share common rights. This verily, is the basis for both these our sections in Hindustan to come together under the common name Hindu Nation... The term Hindu should not be identified with the Hindu community. All sections--whether they be Mussalman or Christian -- are Hindu." (Hamari Ekta Delhi April 15,1979)

A Frenchman asked an Indian, "What is your religion?" The reply was, "Hindu." The Frenchman countered: "That is your nationality; but what is your religion?"

In fact, neither Arabs, nor Frenchmen nor the people of any other country have any doubt that "Hindu" connotes the nationality of this land. Arnold Toynbee in his monumental work A Study of History uses invariably the word Hindu to denote the race, the society and the civilisation born and grown here over the past millennia and extending right up to the present day.

Hindu : National of Bharat

Anyone who is the national of this country, irrespective of being a Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnava, Sikh, Jain, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, Buddhist or Jew by way of his creed or mode of worship, is a Hindu. As Justice M.C. Chagla has forcefully put it, "The French, with their sense of logic and precision, call Indians irrespective of their caste or community L Hindus. I think that is a correct description of all those who live in this country and consider it their home. In true sense, we are all Hindus although we may practise different religions. I am a Hindu because I trace my ancestry to my Aryan forefathers and I cherish the philosophy and the culture which they handed down to successive generations.

"If only we accept this proposition and call ourselves Hindus by race, it would be the greatest triumph for secularism."

The Archbishop of Ernakulam, Dr. Joseph Cardinal parecattil, has stated that the "Church had to draw its cultural nourishment from the local soil - the rich resources of Hinduism." Himself an ardent advocate of Indianisation of Church, the Archbishop affirms that all Indians including Christian and Muslims should imbibe this national culture of the soil.

Misunderstanding Persists

However, there is no lack of political leaders who consider the idea of Hindu Rashtra as rank communalism and a biggest threat to secularism. It is obvious that such assertions are motivated by some political consideration or other.

On the one hand, lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan says, "I believe that including Bangladesh and Pakistan we are one nation. Our states may be different, but all of us belong to the same Bharatiya nationality." On the other hand, the Deputy Speaker of the West Bengal Assembly, Sri Kalimuddin Shams has stated: "Muslims form a separate nation in this country."

It is not surprising, therefore, that all these various pronouncements should lead to serious misunderstandings and confusion regarding concepts like nation, state, Hindu, secular, etc., in the people's mind. And the so-called big leaders are only busy making the confusion worse compounded with a view to catching votes and safeguarding their seats of power. They are also causing, thereby, serious damage to our national unity, mutual goodwill and the national will to work together. But politicians neck-deep in the game of power-politics seem to have little concern for such things.

However, people devoted to the nation and its all-sided progress cannot help delving deep into the question. For if there is no clarity of ideas, or the goal is confused and the hearts do not beat in unison, the nation's onward march will falter, will get slowed down and may even go astray.

What is a Nation?

The foremost basic question is: What is Rashtra or Nation? Scholars on the subject are agreed that a mass of humanity assuming the nomenclature of Nation should be inspired by the feeling of "we-ness" or a common identity and identification. This means that such people experience a feeling of oneness with one another and consider themselves distinct from others. When Edward de Cruz asked a Japanese University student whether the Japanese people considered themselves nearer to the East or the West in their life-style, habits and beliefs, his reply was: "We are like neither the East nor the West. We are simply Japanese. In this fast changing world any dividing line between the East and West has become irrelevant. We take in whatever we feel is beneficial to us without bothering as to wherefrom it has come. But we do care that we remain Japanese all the same. We stick to certain beliefs and traditions and they keep us Japanese. WE have lived through many ups and downs, days of glory as well as adversity, but remained Japanese alright. And we are not in the least apprehensive

that our Japanese character will suffer if we adopt one or the other thing necessary to maintain our existence in this world of competition."

The young man's assertion that even while mixing with the world in a hundred ways they remained basically Japanese, is in fact an indication of their true nationhood. It also becomes necessary for every one of them to work with its intense awareness in order that Japan may play its effective role in the world. Like the Japanese-ness of the Japanese, the Egyptians have their Egyptian-ness the Germans their German-ness and the English their English-ness. The question arises how is this Japanese-ness, German-ness, Egyptian-ness or English-ness, which imparts to these particular masses of humanity a sense of we-ness and a separate identity created? Or, putting the same thing differently, how is the feeling of nationhood evolved"?

How Nation Evolves

Man cannot lead his life in isolation. He needs a co-operative group, a community, to fulfil his needs. In his early evolutionary stage, man needed the cooperation of only a very small group for his protection and livelihood. Then he could carry on with a small tribe which he considered as his enlarged or greater family. But later on he gave up the nomadic life and started leading a settled existence by taking to agriculture. It was then that he developed emotional ties with the life sustaining earth; and that was the dawning of the infancy of nationalism. With the evolution of civilization, man's needs also grew and in order to fulfil them he felt the need for bigger human communities. For that purpose a number of tribes came together and their mutual cooperation led to bigger communities. With the growth of civilisation men catering to intellectual, mental and spiritual needs also became integral parts of such we groups. It was thus that Shakespeare and Shaw in Britain, Goethe and Schopenhauer in Germany, Rousseau and Voltaire in France, Tolstoy and Gorky in Russia and Valmiki and

Kalidasa in Bharat became as much necessary for their civilized lives as food, clothing and shelter.

The stretch of land which a community, imbued with a sense of we-ness, needs for its comprehensive development, forms the natural boundaries of that country. And that community is not merely emotionally attached to it, it also derives from the mother soil a special characteristic for its life, civilisation and culture. Thus the country imparts a distinct identity to that human mass. As Sydney Herbert says: "A historical consideration of diverse nationalities will disclose the fact that there is no nationality of which the basis was not formed by the homeland in which nationality lived a continuous communal life for some period or other. The sentiment of nationality is given greatest expression by the enduring passion of the members of a nationality for their national homeland. Nationality would seem to require a distinct and defined territory on which to establish itself and continue its existence. On such territory, i.e. the national homeland, grow up the traditions, historical associations and other elements language, literature, culture and religion - of which the nationality is compounded and which give it a distinct individuality."

What Constitutes "Nationalism"

In this way, a society having mental and emotional bonds with a particular, well-defined territory and imbued with a sense of we-ness acquires the nomenclature of Nation in that particular piece of land. The great men who contribute to its protection, progress and prosperity evoke deep feelings of reverence and gratitude in that society. And the attachment to values of life and traditions born out of a long existence in that land also become a major link for binding the people of that nation to one another. Apart from that, there are many factors like language, history, festivals, feeling of having common enemies and friends, common economic and political

interests, common aspirations, etc., which strengthen this feeling; but none of them is indispensable for the formation of every nation.

While this story of transition from tribal loyalties to nationalism is being written even today in African countries like Congo, Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana and Zimbabwe, Europe passed through that phase just three or four centuries ago. But it is hard to tell when the Asian countries like Bharat, China and Iran completed this journey. In fact, we find the various features of a vast and organised society present in them as far as recorded history goes, and a highly evolved feeling of we-ness pervading those vast communities. This feeling was based more on religious and cultural, rather than political and economic, factors. While leading a common existence on a well-marked territory for long period, these societies shared common experiences of sacrifice and heroism, joy and suffering. They made many original contributions in material, intellectual, moral and religious spheres; and created durable societies and civilizations on the basis of their distinct cultural values. The inspiration that lay behind such achievements was the feeling like We Chinese, We Iranians, We Bharatiyas. Such sentiments had been evolved centuries before the modern concept of nationalism took birth. The only thing lacking in them was the political aspect which has acquired a special force in the modern view of nationalism.

Force of National Sentiment

How powerful this national sentiment is can be gauged from the fact that the Bailed international ideologies like Islam, Christianity and Communism which aimed at bringing the entire world under one flag by discarding national boundaries, have not been able to wipe out the appeal of nationalism. On the other hand, they themselves have got split and cast into various national moulds. Today the face of Islam is not the same in Turkey, Egypt, Iran or Indonesia. To sustain their separate identities, they have even taken to distinct Islamic creeds. Iran found out a new way of marking itself

off from the Arabs by adopting Shia sect. It also gave a new face to Islam in the form of Sufi sect by a synthesis of the old Parsi beliefs with Islam. While Turkey gave a new shape to Islam by attuning it with Western civilization, Indonesian Islam assumed a new content through the influence of Bharatiya culture. The English people created the Protestant form of Christianity by defying the authority of the Pope who symbolised the will to establish the Holy Empire the world over. Similarly. German and Syrian nationalism paved the way for Lutheran and Syrian Churches. Me Dutch, French and Russian nationalisms also displayed their own versions of Christianity.

Those who dreamed of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat on the strength of their slogan "workers of the world unite," are now finding their proletariats rigidly confined to their respective national boundaries. Not merely that. The proletariats of Communist countries like Russia, China, Vietnam, Albania are now at daggers drawn with each other. Each considers its own national brand of Communism as authentic and derides all others as revisionist, reactionary, expansionist and so on. The Italian and French communists have even declared the dictatorship of the proletariat as unnecessary and created their own brand, Euro-Communism. Why, Russia itself has only last year changed its constitution giving up its basic postulate of a proletariat state and opting for a state belonging to all people. The communist tide today stands broken up into a hundred fragments by dashing against the rock of nationalism. It is clear that the spirit of nationalism has proved more powerful of its being a more natural expression of man's evolutionary cycle, and as such more basic and deep rooted. The spirit of oneness generated by it is much more intense than that of religion, language, etc. Even Stalin, who had derided God and religion as opium of the masses, felt the impact of its spirit and declared :

"Apart from the foregoing (community of language, territory and economic life), one must take into consideration the specific spiritual complexion of the people

constituting a nation. Nations differ not only in their conditions of life, but also in spiritual complexion, which manifests itself in peculiarities of national culture."

See how identical is this view of so rank an atheist as Stalin and that of a great spiritual luminary as Swami Vivekananda who emphasised: "National union in India must be a gathering of its scattered spiritual forces, a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune."